LAL

ANA AQRA ASSOCIATION

My Best Start Project
Scaling Access to Early Childhood Education
Impact report

Supported By

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Table of Content

Program objective

Develop an early childhood education digital program in partnership between the Lebanese Alternative Learning NGO and Ana Aqra Association and the support of TheirWorld, Global Children Charity, and Alfanar. The program's objective is to bridge the early years education gap in Lebanon and provide children living in underserved communities with free access to online and offline digital support programs with a special focus on literacy and foundational skills.

Program description

Learning the letters and setting strong foundation skills for early childhood education (KG1, KG2, KG3) was the essence of the "My Best Start" programs.
Ana Aqra designed the methodology and the lessons and LAL team adapted them into digital lesson plans, created visuals and audio for each one of them, and digitalized them.
The outcome of the project was 56 units published, comprising 5 to 7 lessons each.
The program was piloted in 9 education centers between February and April 2022.



What follows, is an analysis of the data gathered during and after the pilot to measure the impact of the program on its users. It also helps identify challenges and difficulties, and evaluate the field implementation in order to amend, refine and complete the digitalization of the program.

General Population

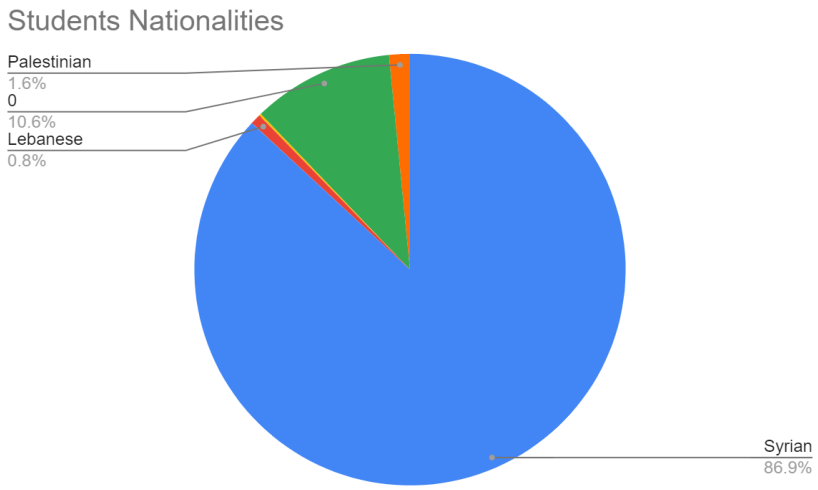
1. Population

The pilot population is students enrolled in or supported by NGOs' education centers.
The program will later expand to target all students in Lebanese Schools through the "Deep Integration" of the Tabshoura platform with the Center of Education Research and Development's Mawaridy platform.
The pilot was limited to partner NGOs due to the flexibility and accessibility factors.
Beside our project' partner "Ana Aqra" who tested the digital program on a sample of **405 children** working from home, **8 NGOs** participated in the pilot and used the program on site in **15 education centers** (table below) covering Beirut, Beqaa, Baalbek, Jbeil and North and South of Lebanon areas, with a total of **1410 students** and **58 educators**.
Student ages range between 3 to 7 years.
Student grades and groups are KG1, KG2 and KG3

A. Associations and centers

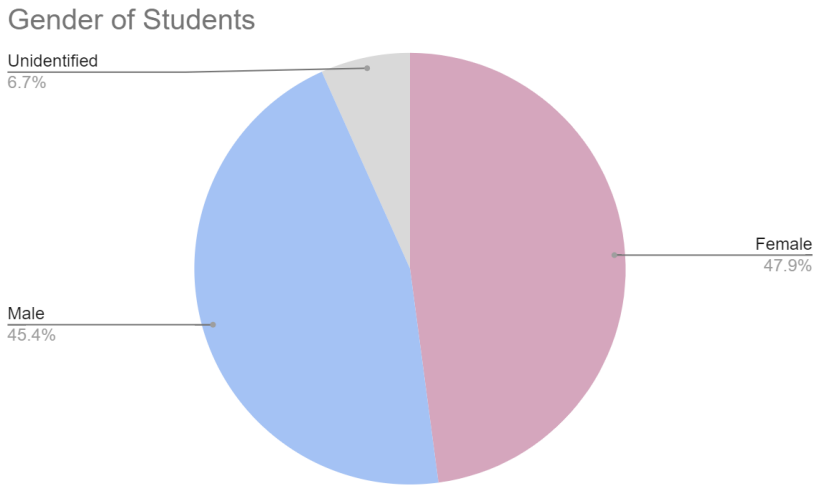
Associations	Centers
AVSI	Moasat center
General Union of Palestinian Women	Al Salam Al Houda Houda Zaidan Al Shateh Al Qouds Al Brej
Jusoor	Al-Jurahiya School
Tamkeen	Sawiri Alshibani
Terre de Hommes Italy	Jbeil Shwaya
Joint Christian Committee	Sabra
Women's program association	Bourj Al Barajneh
Ahlam Lajae association	Mar Elias

B. Nationalities:



The students were mostly Syrian refugees (86,9%), followed by Palestinian (1,6%) and Lebanese (0,8%).

C. Gender

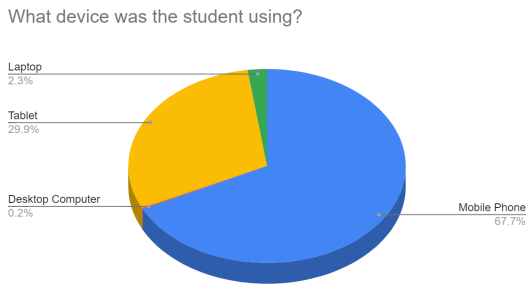


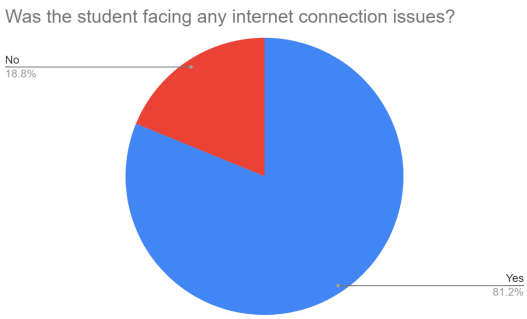
The percentage of boys and girls was almost the same with slightly more girls participating in the pilot (47,9% female against 45,4% male).

2. Infrastructure

The infrastructure changed from one center to the other, giving us a good perspective as to how to launch the program:

- Only 3 centers have a tablet for each student.
- 1 center has a limited number of devices but no projector.
- 3 centers are equipped with projectors and have a limited number of devices.
- 1 center has only a projector and no devices. Teachers are using their mobile phones. To help in the implementation, LAL provided the center with 5 tablets.
- As internet connection was an issue in most of the settings, 19 “Tabshoura-in-a-Box” offline solution were given to 8 of the centers, each box for a group of children.





3. Timeframe and location

When: Between February 2022 and April 2022.
Where: Beirut, Beqaa, Baalbek, South of Lebanon, North of Lebanon, and Byblos.
What: 56 digital units in foundational skills, Arabic, French, and English.

Evidence Generation and Data collection

The evidence generation and data collection upon pilot completion is based on a total number of 1410 students, 58 educators, 8 NGOs, and 15 education centers.

Gathering information was completed in three different ways:

I. User numerical data given by QLIK Software: QLIK is a software specialized in data visualization and executive dashboards, implemented and customized with the support of Alfanar, which allows LAL to collect a wide range of digital data on the usage of the platform.

II. Attendance and evaluation sheets: An evaluation sheet was created on google drive and shared with each educator from all participating organizations. Educators received a unique copy of the sheet that includes students' login details, and a list of 19 questions to answer. Almost all of the questions had a list of the drop-down menus to select the answers from, in addition to a section where additional notes can be added for each student individually.

III. Feedback and Survey: Feedback surveys were shared with educators to fill out after the pilot completion to evaluate the digital experience. We asked the educators to observe the interaction of the students with the platform and to fill the survey accordingly.

Two field visits completed the data collection. It allowed us to observe the reality of what is happening on the ground, meet the teachers and discuss with them the needs they have and the challenges they face in order to come-up with mitigation plans.

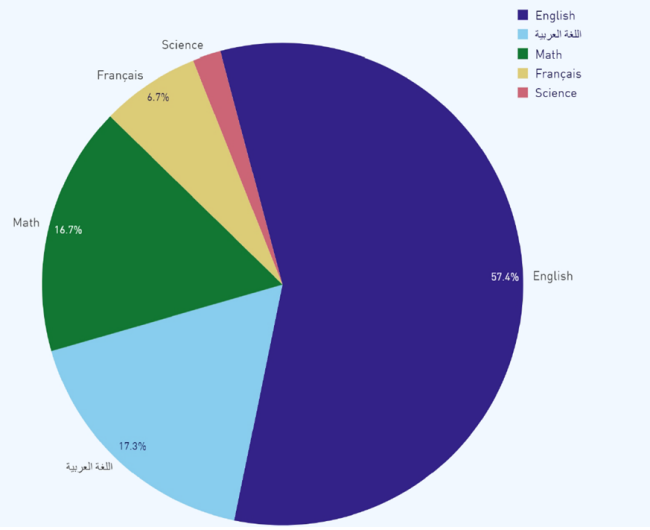
I. User numerical data

The following numerical data is collected from Qlik analytical software and shows the activity on the Tabshoura platform as to My Best Start KG1, KG2, and KG3 courses.

1. Active users

68,5% of the students used the platform consistently during the pilot period. They totalized 148,298 hits on the platform, thus 149,298 activities (1 hit + or - = 1 activity). Each of them, in average, completed 221.67 activities.

2. Percentage of users per course

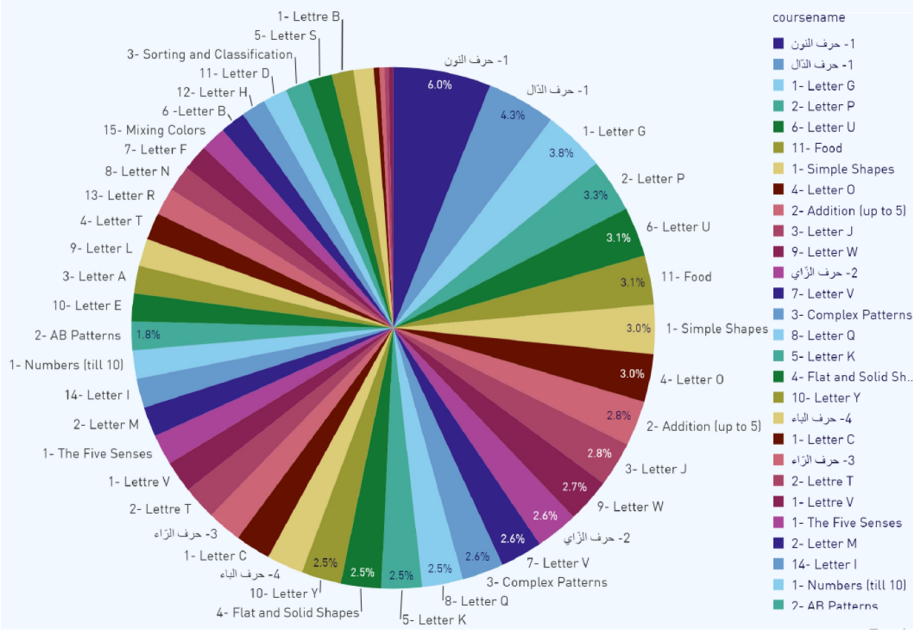


English comes first in terms of usage. The teachers interviewed during the field visit explained that this was due to two main factors:

1. The fact that English is the topic that was entirely completed while French and Arabic are still missing some units.
2. The fact that foreign language is the most challenging topic with Early Childhood Education. Digital support programs can enhance foreign language acquisition, and this is why language teachers are keener to introduce digital in their teaching habits.

3. Filter By Course

Course Name	Count(log_timecreated)	Course Name	Count(log_timecreated)	Course Name	Count(log_timecreated)
1- حرف النون	8951	5- Letter K	3715	9- Letter L	2514
1- حرف الدّال	6321	4- Flat and Solid Shapes	3690	4- Letter T	2492
1- Letter G	5685	10- Letter Y	3656	13- Letter R	2486
2- Letter P	4928	4- حرف الباء	3334	8- Letter N	2428
6- Letter U	4553	1- Letter C	3237	7- Letter F	2392
11- Food	4533	3- حرف الرّاء	3159	15- Mixing Colors	2325
1- Simple Shapes	4505	2- Lettre T	3109	6 -Letter B	2311
4- Letter O	4393	1- Lettre V	2924	12- Letter H	2250
2- Addition (up to 5)	4149	1- The Five Senses	2805	11- Letter D	2206
3- Letter J	4122	2- Letter M	2744	3- Sorting and Classification	2201
9- Letter W	4072	14- Letter I	2686	5- Letter S	2188
2- حرف الزّاي	3916	1- Numbers (till 10)	2612	1- Lettre B	1984
7- Letter V	3850	2- AB Patterns	2608	2- Lettre A	1854
3- Complex Patterns	3811	10- Letter E	2587	1- Colors	507
8- Letter Q	3726	3- Letter A	2524	3- Numbers (till 5)	429
				1- Inside – Outside	415
				2- Numbers (till 3)	411



These two tables show all the units that were piloted, the number of accesses to those units, and confirm that the English language is the predominant content used by teachers for the pilot.

4. Users Per Week

Week	# Distinct Users	Average hit per user	Median hit per user
2022/05	28	4999.315789	8
2022/06	58	37.71428571	25
2022/07	419	84.00520833	56
2022/08	492	83.3215859	51
2022/09	482	84.19170984	61
2022/13	11	164	164
2022/14	112	57.69565217	37

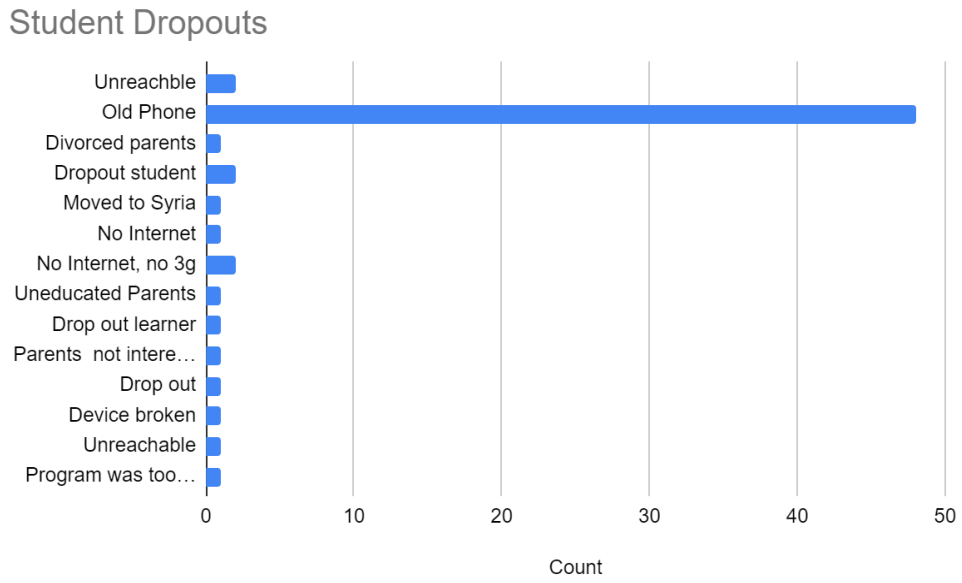
Not all NGOs started the first week which explain the discrepancies between the first week and the rest of the weeks.
The week before the last one has the highest rate of usage due to the fact that teachers were trying to complete the program before the end of the pilot.

In conclusion, the above numerical data allowed us to define the number of users, the frequency of their usage of the platform per hit and per week during the pilot period, the courses that were completed.
This allowed us when we interviewed some of the teachers to focus our discussion on what was piloted.

II. Attendance and evaluation sheet

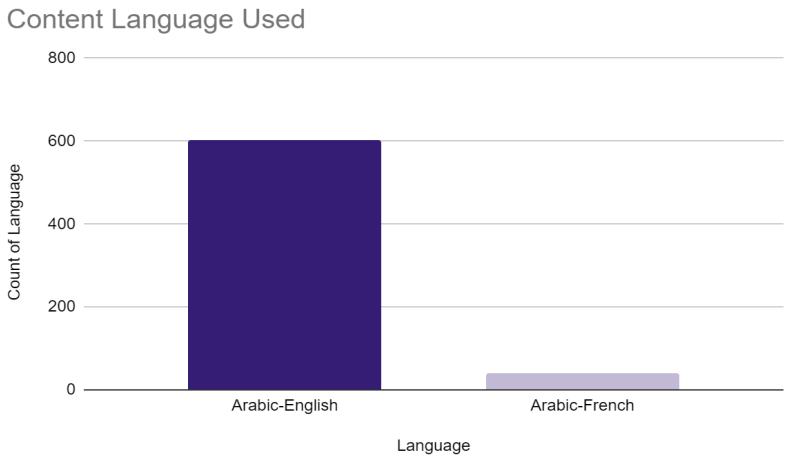
During our workshops with the teachers before the launching of the pilot, we shared the attendance and evaluation sheet and explained its objective and the way to fill it. This gave the teachers the sense of what we were interested in observing and the impact of this will result in the improvement of the program.
To interpret some of the results and dig further into the reasons behind the findings, we initiated discussions with the teachers we met during our field visit.

A. Students' dropouts



One of the main reasons for dropouts was the fact that old mobile phones do not support the program.
This confirmed the fact that the main access to digital learning for underserved communities is done through mobile phones.
What was interesting to note is that internet accessibility even if it is a challenge is not one of the main dropout reasons.
Possible mitigation: Devices donation and collection of refurbished laptops.

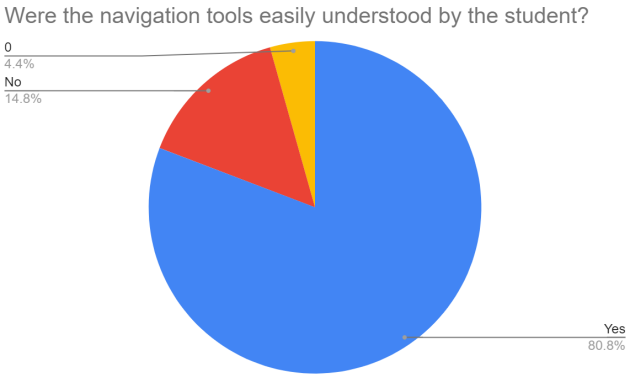
B. Language used



Teaching in Lebanon is bilingual either in Arabic and English or in Arabic and French. The table showed that Arabic and English rated much more than Arabic and French. Our population being mainly a refugees population, English is favored over French as it is considered more useful in case of repeated migrations. This assumption was confirmed by the teachers interviewed.
The refugee studying french are usually those who are (or aim at being) enrolled in public schools using French as a second language as they live in an area where they do not have access to schools teaching English as a second language.

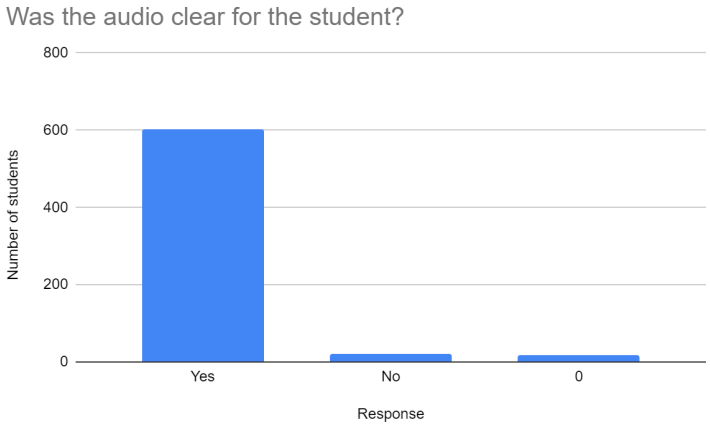
C. The digital experience

- Navigation tools



Most of the students navigated the program very easily after the first introductory session with the teachers. Teachers shared their amazement at how fast the children learned to navigate the lessons.
Outcome: We will keep the same layout.

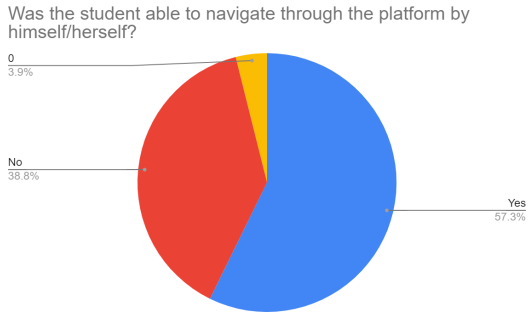
- Audio

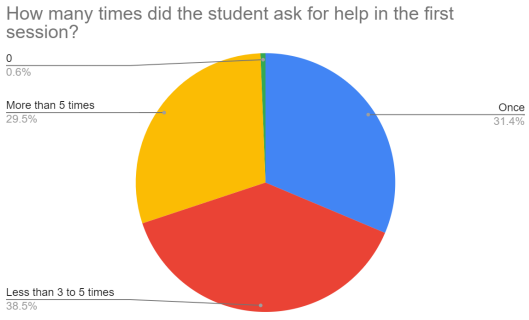


Although the audio was clear for a significant percentage of students, we faced an issue we did not predict: Our program is conceived in a way where the audio for the lessons starts automatically. When a whole class is using the program and all the audio starts at the same time, it produces a cacophony.
One solution the teachers came up with is to mute the devices and use only one device for the audio. This however prevents each student to work at his own pace but solve the audio issue.
Possible mitigation:

- Earphones
- Lower the audio

- Autonomous navigation and support required



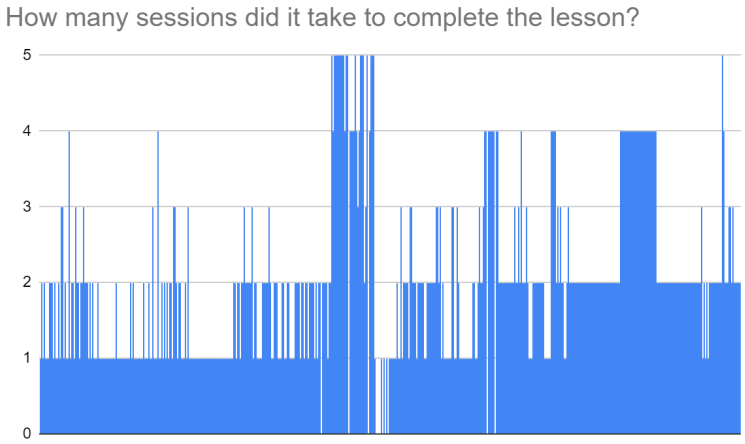


Although 57,3% percentage of students navigated the platform autonomously, 38,8% still needed support. After our field explorations, we learned that students are mostly used to interact using phones, not tablets. One of the major differences between navigating through a phone and navigating through a tablet is the fact that the navigation on phones is mostly vertical while navigation on tablets in general, and for our program in particular, horizontal.

Outcome: one of My Best Start objectives is to enhance digital literacy, we could add a unit that will focus on the navigation activities. It can be a requirement before starting the program.

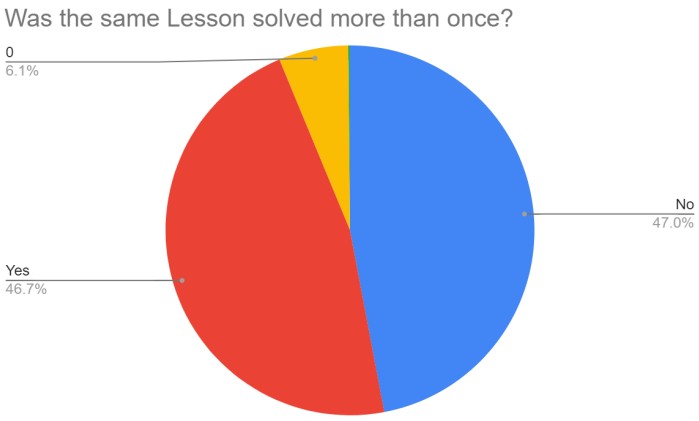
D. Content

1. Length of the lessons



The lessons were considered long by a majority of users. Many lessons needed more than a session to be completed. Some lessons for instance needed as many as 5 sessions.
Mitigation: As the lessons are divided in 5 to 7 subsections, it's easy to split a lesson into several sessions.

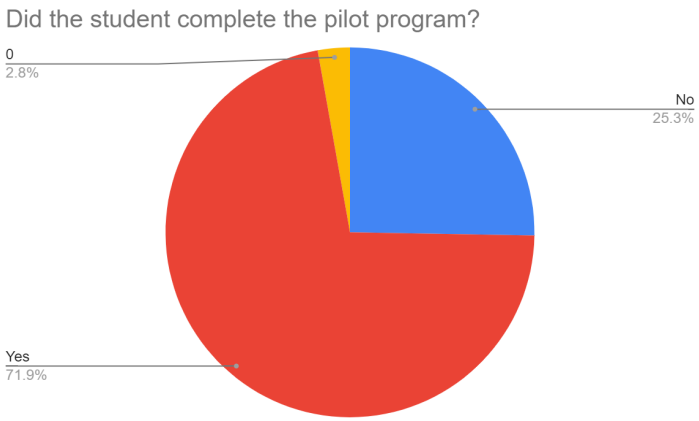
2. Trials



Almost half of the users repeated the same lesson more than once. When we asked the teachers about it, we learned that it was mostly English lessons that were repeated as the

children are not familiar with the language and it was useful to repeat part of the lessons to ingrain the language acquisition and the right pronunciation.

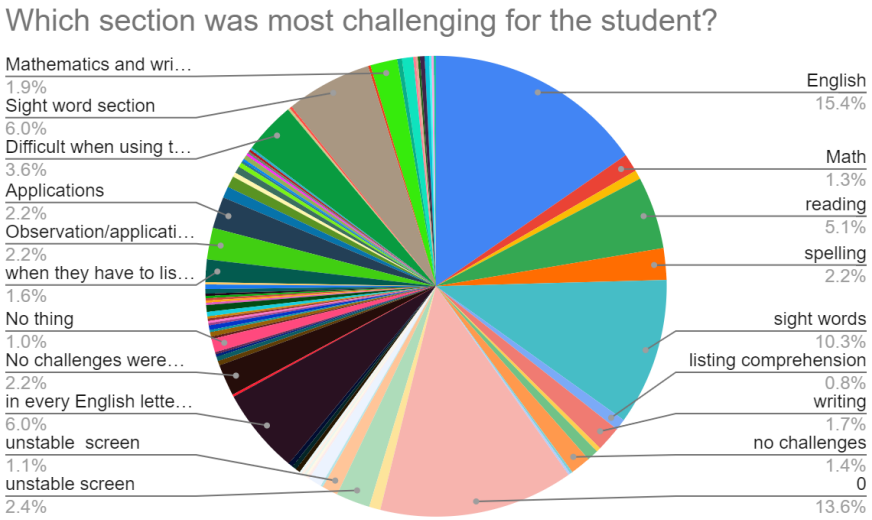
3. Completion



71, 9 % of the students completed the pilot program.

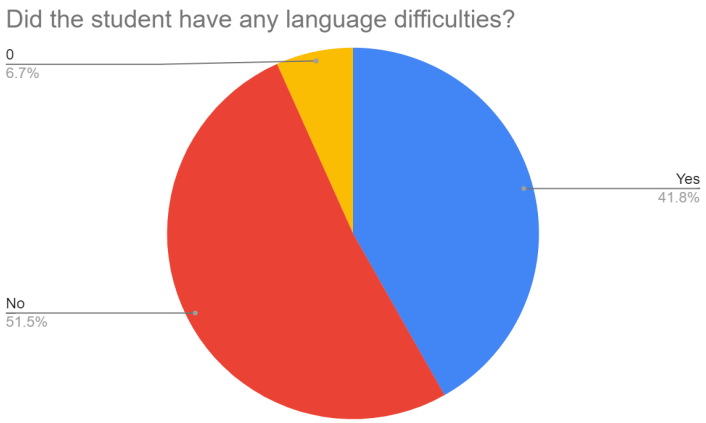
3. Challenges

- Sections



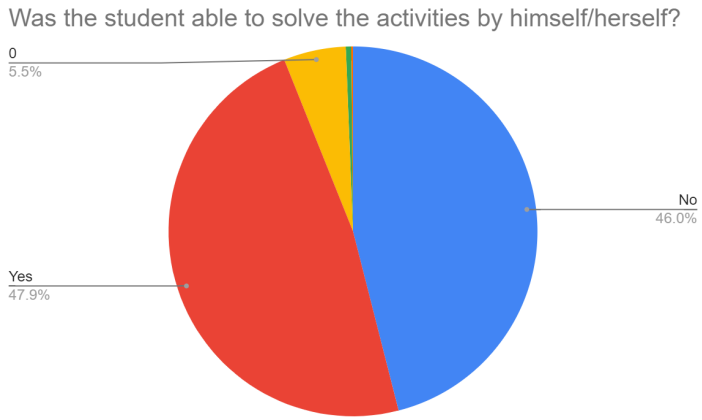
English was the most challenging for the students and mostly the “Sight Word” section. This result is expected as they are not being exposed to English at home.
Mitigation: Review the “Sight Word” section to simplify it.

- Language



This confirms the above results. The language was challenging for 41.8% of the students as the only place they are exposed to a foreign language in the classroom. Due to the repetitive interruptions of school the last few years, this exposure was minimal.
Mitigation: An additional unit giving the common instructions in 2 languages: Arabic and English or Arabic and French to familiarize the students with the way of asking questions.

- Ability to work by himself/herself

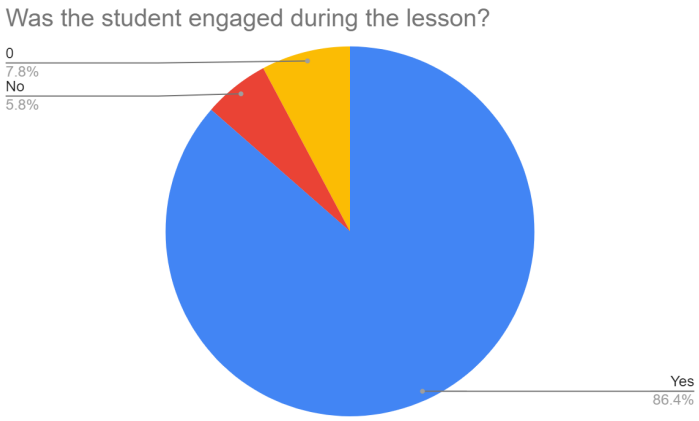


The evaluation sheets showed that the ability to solve the activities autonomously increased a lot between the start of the pilot and its ending. The teachers interviewed noted that the

repetition of the same pattern for lessons and activities is what helped the students become more and more autonomous with time.
Outcome: Repetition of the same pattern is important. We will keep it.

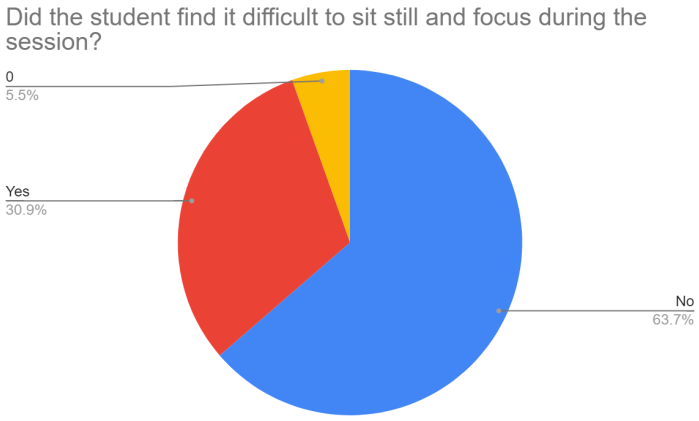
4. Motivation

- Engagement



86,4% of the students were engaged during the lesson, which shows a positive impact of the digital program on the motivation of the students. Teachers said the students were serious about the digital program and did not act as if it was only a game.

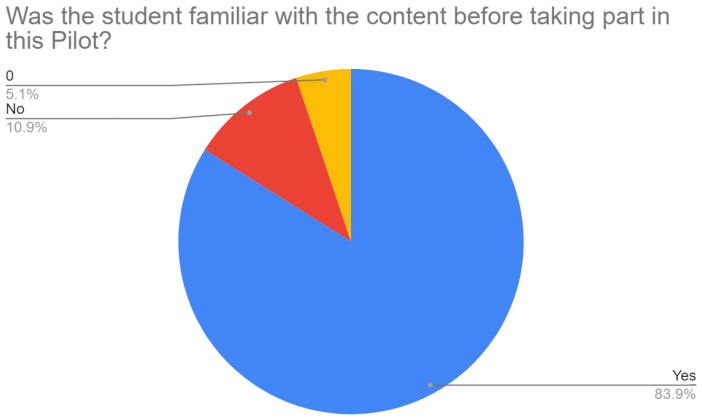
- Focus



The impact of the digital program on the ability to focus of the students is positive as 63,7% were sitting still and focusing, thus taking the learning seriously. This was confirmed by the field visit and the teachers' feedback. Teachers shared that they were surprised by the students' serious attitude toward the program.

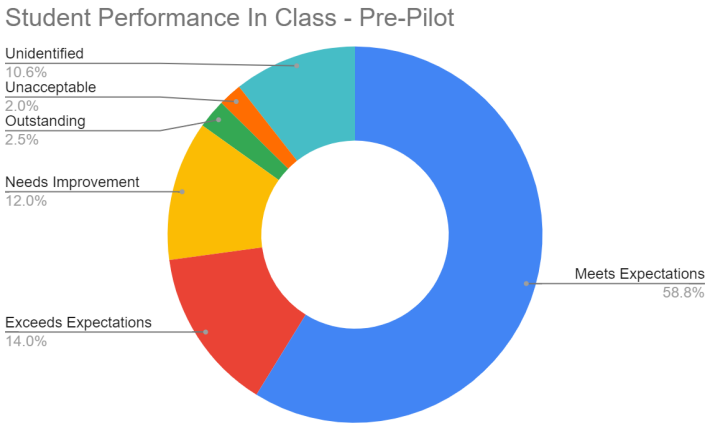
5. Level of difficulty

- Prerequisites

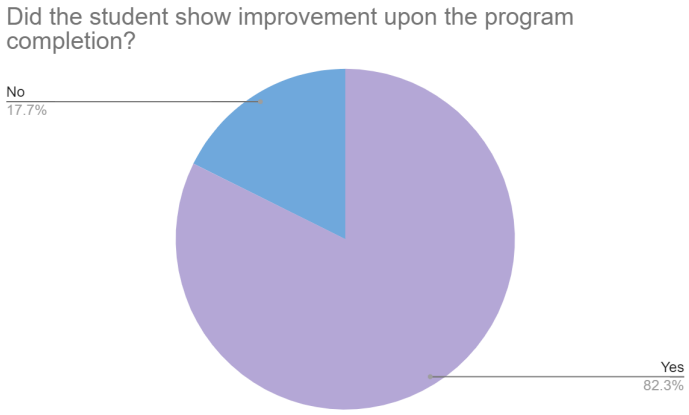


83,9 % of the students were familiar with the content. This is due to the fact that the pilot happened in March and April, almost at the end of the school year. As the school year is having several interruptions due to the unstable situation in the country, teachers shared the positive impact of this program on recalling certain concepts and ingraining them.

- Improvement



In order to measure the improvement, we took as a baseline the student performance in class before the pilot. 58,8% of the students met expectations before the pilot.



82, 3% of the student showed improvement upon the program completion while 17,7% did not. We noticed that the highest percentage of the students not improving were in the center where the teachers were using the program through a projector only and the students were not interacting directly with the program as they did not have any device.
In another center which also had a high number of students not improving, the access was through laptops in a computer lab room. The teachers noted that it was hard for young children to use a mouse and the computer layout.
Mitigation: Promote the use of tablets for the younger students and put the center in contact with initiatives that would provide tablet donations.

In conclusion, the attendance and evaluation sheet showed that the main reason for dropouts was the accessing the platform through old phones, that the English/Arabic program was used much more than the French/Arabic program, and that the students needed support only at the beginning to navigate the program and used it autonomously after a few lessons. As for the content, it was considered useful and complete although the length of the lessons was considered long. The program had a positive impact on the performance of the students and motivated them.

What will be added to the program in a future phase is a digital training unit and a language support unit for the children to get used to navigating the program and understand the instructions. Those units will be considered a pre-requisite to start the program. We could merge them into one training unit. We will also review the sight word section to simplify it if possible.

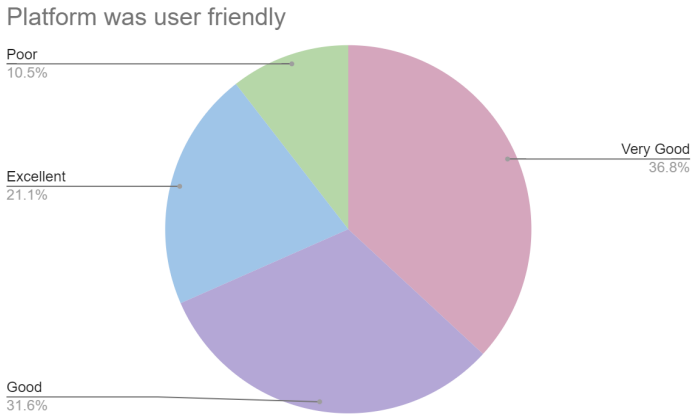
A parents' guide on the methodology as well as the navigation could be useful to help the parents use the program at home with their children. We can also produce a tutorial specifically for parents.

In the tutorial for teachers, we could add a section on the pedagogy behind the digital program and encourage the teachers to have a facilitator position and to give more autonomy to the children.

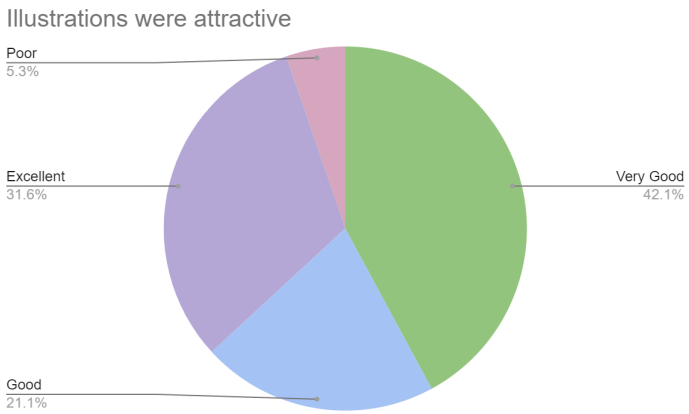
III. Feedback Surveys

Results were collected from 19 respondents representing 30% of the teachers who piloted the program. While the assessment targeted the students' interactions with the program, the survey objective was to evaluate the interaction of the teachers themselves with the program. It was completed by discussions with the teachers to better understand certain findings. We deduced some recommendations from those surveys. In general, the feedback surveys answered the question: How well were the following aspects targeted?

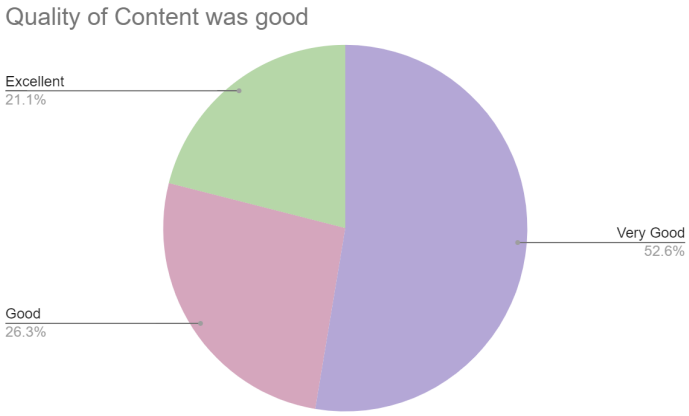
Friendliness of the platform:



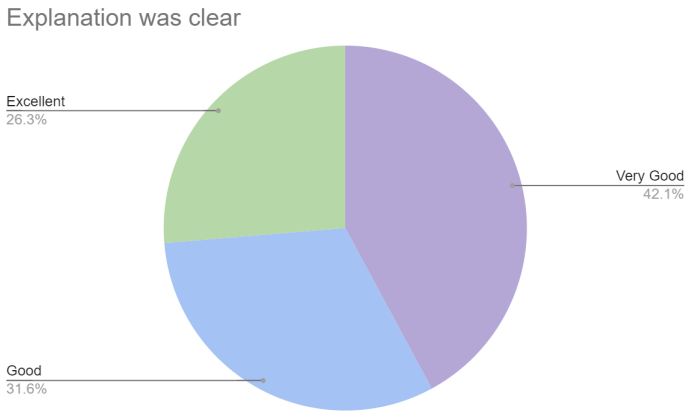
The platform was considered user-friendly by most of the teachers. 89, 5% of the answers indicated good to excellent.
Recommendation: Keep the same layout.



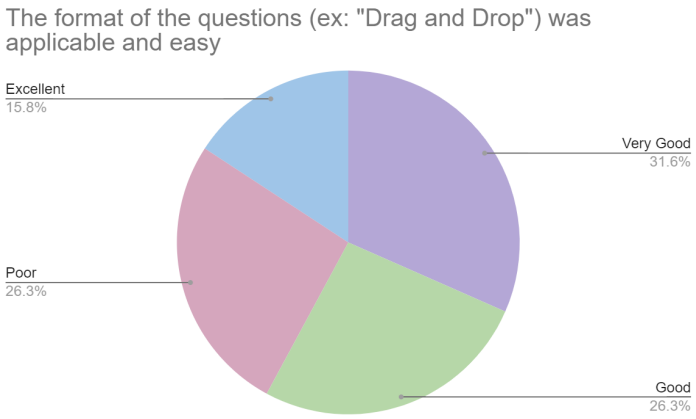
The illustrations were considered attractive by 94,7% of the teachers.
Recommendation: Keep the same visual identity.



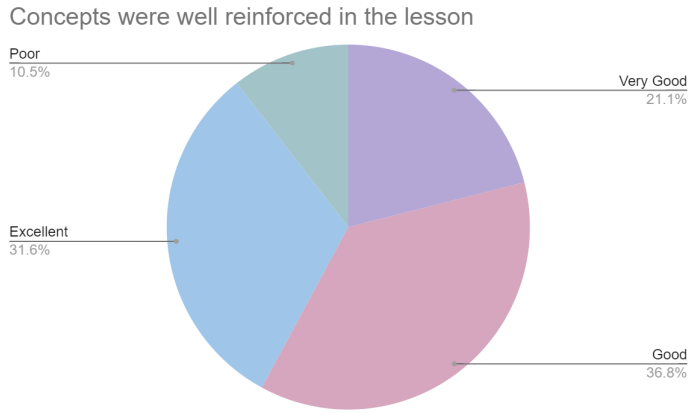
According to the teachers, the quality of the content varies from Good to Excellent which comfort us about the methodology adopted and the digital transformation of this content.
Recommendation: Keep the same pedagogical process.



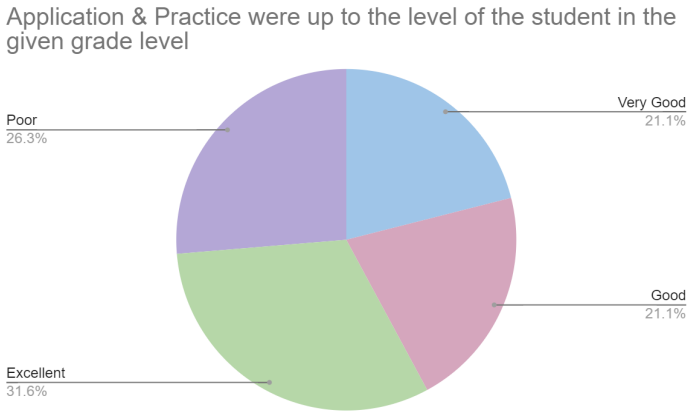
Clarity of the explanation was considered good to excellent by the majority of the teachers. Recommendation: The step-by-step procedure (one concept or information/one slide) adopted during the digital transformation proved successful and will be kept as is.



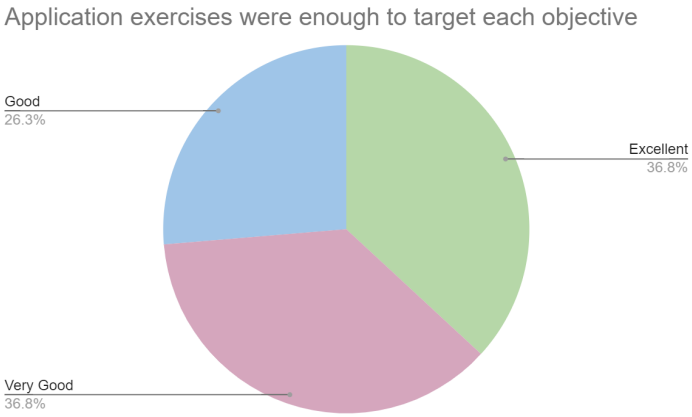
While the format of the questions was considered good by 73,7% of the users, 26,3% had a poor experience. This was due to a drag and drop issue we faced during the pilot. This bug is now fixed.



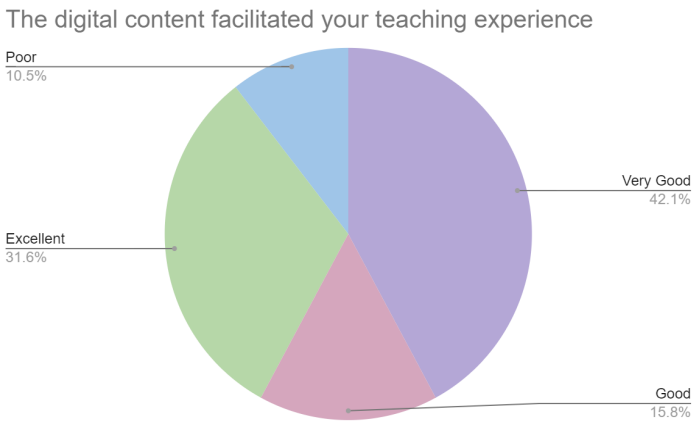
Concepts englobe letter recognition, writing, phonological awareness, blending, listening comprehension, sight words, and spelling. A majority of the teachers considered that the digital program helps them reinforce the concepts.



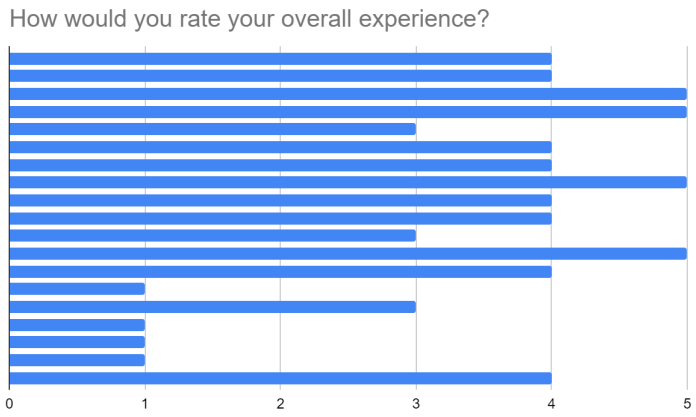
Teachers noted that even when the concept was a bit hard on students, the fact that it was in a digital form motivated the students. The poor result was mainly due to the drag and drop bug that made it hard for some students to complete the activities, to certain concepts considered difficult by the teachers as well as by the language challenge.
Recommendation: Simplify the concepts when possible and address the language challenge by adding listening activities.



The number of activities was considered Good to Excellent by all the users.
Recommendation: We will keep the same “number” of activities.

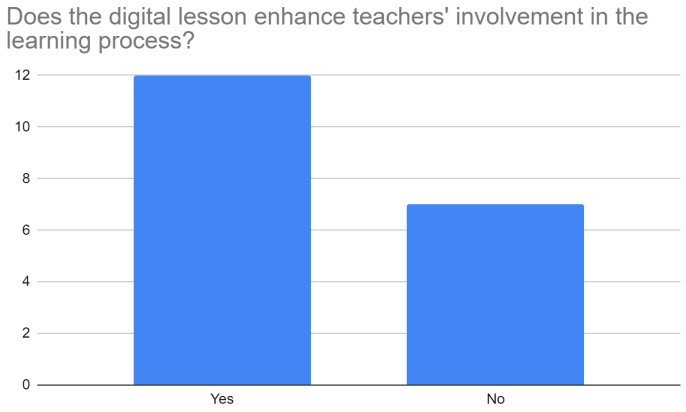


Almost 90% of the teachers considered that the content facilitated their teaching experience. The 10% that did not think the content facilitated their teaching were also the ones who did not have the correct infrastructure. Using a digital program only on a projector is not the ideal solution. Children who did not interact with the program were not engaged.
Recommendation: Find ways to solve the devices issues before implementing the program.

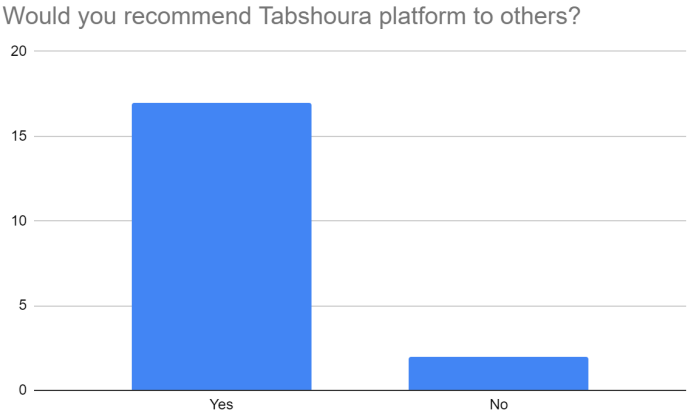


Extremely Dissatisfied - 1
Extremely Satisfied - 5

Most of the teachers were satisfied with the overall experience. They all raised the drag and drop bug and the access to devices as a challenge.



What we noticed during the field visit, is that the teachers have difficulty to position themselves as facilitators. They think their role is essential and cannot avoid from explaining and intervening orally all the time which prevents the students from learning autonomously.
Recommendation: Add to the teachers' tutorial a section on their role as facilitators.



In conclusion, the feedback from educators, in general, is positive and indicates the objective of the pilot was successfully met. Educators have complemented the illustrations and activities, and the content.

The main challenges faced by all participants were mostly due to internet connectivity, poor devices that do not support the platform, lack of resources like devices for the students to use, and some technical difficulties from the platform that are currently being amended. Furthermore, language barriers always impose a risk when studying other languages through technology.

The level of difficulty was right even if some of the students, aged 3 and 4 needed frequent support from facilitators when using the platform.

A majority of teachers will recommend the program to others.

Annex I

Teachers' interviews

Let's hear some of the teachers:

What did you enjoy most about the platform?
"The platform is rich in illustrations and activities, helps the students to retry the activity if it was done wrong."
"The platform was good in every detail; the kids were able to concentrate and play and figure out the correct answer to every objective."
"I like the most the flow and the sequence of ideas."
"Lots of things like the way of explanation, the use of visual words, and the type of activities."
"The best part was the form of activities in every objective."
"The most thing that I enjoyed in this platform is the effects, pictures and sounds

What section/area can be improved in the lessons? How?
"Sight words, make it easier for 4-year-old students."; "Sight words section was challenging."
"Explain the lesson more."
"The technical glitch and suspension."
"Due to the big number of activities present in one lesson it wasn't easy to finish them all by one session. So, the parents split them into 2 days, so having the choice to resume the activities from where they stopped or restart from the beginning option will serve them better."
"Sometimes there are several objectives in one lesson for example while learning Letter I, they have to look for the sound of letter R, D and E, and even look for the word Red, Blue, which was irrelevant to the objective."
"Grab out - Drag and Drop on Tablet."
"Add more Arabic letters."

What features were missing?
"The ability to see if the student finished the video, we had to tell the parents to send pictures as proof."
"That the student can use the application without the Internet." "Offline application."
"Every student was using the platform on their mobile and they had problems with navigating.
"I think that the platform is optimal in its features except for some technical glitches that a user may encounter while surfing it."
"I didn't find anything you would miss in the experience My Best Start."

“Maybe some animation, where characters can move while pointing to a certain body part, or even doing moves while asking questions so that students can understand the meaning of the question since there is a language barrier here. The teacher has to explain the question in the Arabic language for students to understand it.”

Do you have any comments or feedback that you would like to share?
“Help to parents to recharge enough megabytes to continue the videos on Tabshoura.”
“There are a lot of technical problems during using the platform.”
“Tabshoura is a very important application that helps the student to acquire information in an easy and simple way.”
“It was a good experience, thank you for this opportunity.”
“The platform provides incentives and an interactive approach to teaching.”
“The parents expressed their gratitude because the platform replaces YouTube.”
“This experience would have been different if at least a group of students were able to work at the same time, and we faced some difficulties in which there was no electricity and one laptop. It could be a great platform for older students”
"Wishing you the best of luck!”
“Thank you very much. It was a sweet, wonderful, useful, and entertaining experience at the same time.”

“All the students who attended the sessions were not really able to navigate through the platform by themselves. They needed personal assistance, to be able to accomplish an exercise or even a specific task. The activities were intense for the students to complete in one session because they weren't able to work independently. Not all the students were engaged during the lesson, some were distracted by the tablet itself. Internet connection issues were faced during many sessions.”
“Sadly it wasn’t an enjoyable experience, too difficult for my students’ age who are around 3-4 years old.”

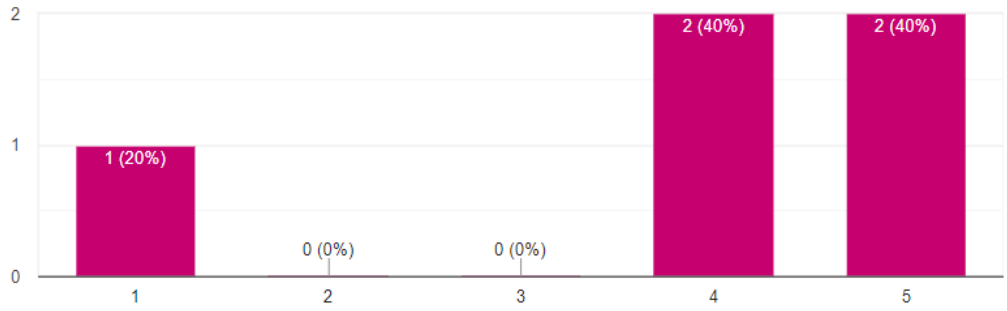
Training workshops have to be long and detailed, especially due to most of the participant educators are not too familiar with the technology of the platform. Most of the students' activity solutions were not submitted onto the platform.

Annex II

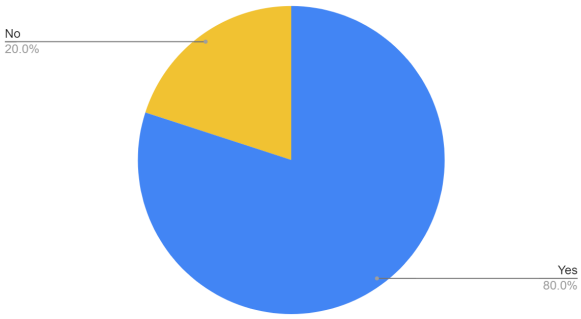
Feedback from Tabshoura-in-a-box users

How would you rate your overall experience using Tabshoura-in-a-box?

5 responses



Was the device easy to use?



Would you recommend Tabshoura-in-a-box to others?

5 responses